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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SABBATH AMONG THE HEBREWS.

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Having discussed in a previous paper* the origin of the Sabbath I propose to follow its history further. The first point of departure of the Hebrews from the Sabbath of the Accadians is an unchanging seventh day. When or how the worship of the moon and a division of the month into periods of about seven days was changed to a fixed week, with a Sabbath on the seventh day, without reference to the moon, we have no means of determining. It may have been done by Abram when he instituted Jehovah worship in order to separate the worship of the true God from heathen practices. The change must have been made after the separation of the Hebrews from the Accadians, because, as we have seen, the Babylonian Sabbath which was derived from the Accadian was celebrated on certain days of the lunar month rather than at a fixed interval of seven days. Yet the change must have been made very early in Hebrew history, for if the Sabbath had been dependent on the moon, it would not have attained that sanctity as an independent institution which we see it had. But established early and standing alone as a divine seventh day we can understand how it would become sacred and even confer a sanctity on the number seven.

A not improbable supposition is that it was changed by Moses. He altered the method of reckoning time among the Israelites, on their departure from Egypt, from the solar method which prevailed there to the older and simpler lunar method employed by their ancestors. The celebration of the full moon festival of the springtime was the occasion of their departure and naturally made the beginning of their year. So, too, when they took up their Sabbath observance, it is

*Cf. THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT, Jan. 1891.

probable that he fixed the time for every seventh day irrespective of the moon. The mosaic era being the formative period in Hebrew history is the time when such a change would most easily and naturally occur. We have no record or intimation of such a change afterwards and know of no other time when it could well have taken place. It must have been made before the writing of the book of the Covenant which emphasizes the character of the Sabbath as an institution of humanity independent of moons.* The new moon celebrations mentioned in connection with the Sabbath are spoken of throughout the Old Testament as being observed independently of it and on different days. These appear, too, to be festivals rather than days of rest and abstinence. So, the Sabbath must have become independent of the moon observances before the time of these allusions.

The cause of the change may have been the desire to have an institution peculiar to the Hebrews and the worship of Jehovah or it may have arisen simply for the sake of convenience. The seven day period being the usual division of time would be the standard and the inconvenience of a week liable to variation even though it be but once in two months would be avoided by making the week a fixed period of seven days.

Aside from any proof of its existence before Moses we could not readily believe that he gave the Sabbath to the Israelites as an altogether new and unknown observance. Such is not the source of any other Hebrew institutions. We have no reason to suppose that any of the rites of their religion *originated* with him. Sacrifices, cleansings, circumcision, and the other ceremonies of the Israelites were much the same as those employed by the nations around them in the worship of their gods. As Moses adapted and sanctified these others to the worship of Jehovah, so it is natural to suppose that the Sabbath had its origin in some customary observance of the seventh day by the ancestors of the Hebrews or the nations around them. The passages which speak of the Sabbath as a sign between Jehovah and Israel (Ex. 31: 13; Ezek. 20: 12) are not inconsistent with this

* Cf. Ex. 20: 8; 23: 12; cf. also Deut. 5: 12.

view, for the observance of an already existing institution could be made the sign of the covenant. These passages do not deny the existence of the Sabbath in some form before Moses.

After the time of Moses the Sabbath becomes more a matter of history. We shall notice first the method of observing it. The chief point in the observance of the Sabbath from earliest times appears to be rest. It is probable that this was an important element in the Sabbath of the Accadians and in that of the ancestors of the Hebrews. The earliest records we have of the Sabbath show that the element of rest was invariably connected with it. Thus, we infer from 2 Kings 4: 25, that in the early part of the ninth century B. C. domestic animals were free, on the Sabbath, from the ordinary work of the farm, though the same passage also shows that journeys were taken on the Sabbath day. Amos 8: 5 indicates that in the last part of the same century all ordinary traffic was suspended on the Sabbath. So, two centuries and a half later, 600 B. C., Jeremiah forbids the bearing of burdens, not stating it as a new command but as the law of the fathers (Jer. 17: 21-27). In the exile period Sabbath keeping became among the Jews a mark of fidelity to their religion and its observance was strictly insisted upon. It was to be made an honorable, holy, day and a day of delight observed by turning away from one's own pleasures, duties and conversation to the peculiarly appropriate duties of the day (Is. 58: 13). Eunuchs are permitted to enjoy its privileges and are promised a name and a memorial in the temple of God for their faithfulness.

After the exile the Sabbath seems to have grown in strictness. We have an account in Neh. 13: 15-22 of the enforcement of the neglected Sabbath laws. The desecration consisted in the treading of wine presses, bearing of burdens by men and animals, the selling of victuals and wares.

The scribal laws came into force in the later centuries and the Sabbath was a yoke of oppression from that time, till the time of Christ. Thus we find the sanctity of the Sabbath so thoroughly fixed in the minds of the people that the Jews were exempted by the Romans from military duty on the

seventh day. Their ideal was absolute rest. The other observances of the Sabbath besides rest, were the sacrifices which were double those of ordinary days (Numbers 22: 9), and holy convocations (Lev. 23: 3; Is. 1: 13). 2 Kings 4: 23 shows that it was customary to go to the prophet on Sabbaths and new moons. On the Sabbath the shew bread was renewed (Lev. 24: 8). Joy and pleasure do not seem to have been wrong (Hos. 2: 11).

Such being in general the facts relating to the observance of the Sabbath, what do we learn from them, as to the observance of the Sabbath at different periods in the history of the Hebrews? Was there a growth and development of the Sabbath from the form instituted by Moses, and observed by the people in the early centuries after the conquest, or did it remain essentially the same from Moses till the time of Christ? That the Sabbath of the scribes was developed in the period of pharisaic legalism preceding the Christian era into something different from the Sabbath preceding the exile, and that the Sabbath burdens condemned by Christ were not laid upon the people by Moses, is universally admitted.

But that there was any change in the character of the Sabbath laws and observances, before the fourth century B. C., sufficient to affect its essential character we have no proof. The Sabbath of early Israel is essentially the Sabbath of rest. The conception of the Sabbath as a day of rest is maintained throughout.

That in the early periods of history the Sabbath was a rest only of farmers and laborers for humanistic purposes, cannot be proved. It is only natural that such rest should be most prominent in the codes, for the Israelites were an agricultural people.

Omitting the testimony of the Hexateuch, the date of whose authorship is a subject of dispute and which I shall consider later, we find from very early times traces of strict Sabbath laws, and a varying carefulness in observing them.*

The allusion to the temple worship in 2 Kings 11: 5† and 16: 18, indicates an elaborate service connected with the

* Lotz.

† Cf. 2 Chron. 2: 3, 4.

observance of the Sabbath as early as the eighth and ninth centuries B. C. "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn, and the Sabbath that we may set forth wheat" (Amos 8: 5), gives indisputable evidence that there was a law, known and enforced against trafficking on the Sabbath. Though Hos. 2: 11, "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her new moons, her feasts and her Sabbaths," shows that mirth was allowed at this time, it does not indicate that the Sabbath was not a day of rest. It is held by some that with Isaiah the Sabbath was only a day of sacrifices, but Is. 1: 13 "Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, new moons and Sabbaths," only shows an abhorrence for heathen observances. Jer. 17: 21-27 shows that a strict Sabbath law was known as early as 600 B. C. It gives a direct command against burden bearing, and does not state it as a new law, but bases the command on the law of the fathers.

The law was violated but the fact of violation involves the existence, and the knowledge of the law. So in Lam. 2: 6, the complaint is made that the Sabbaths have been forgotten. The more elaborate laws of the Priest code seem to have been known to Ezekiel in the early period of the captivity. He refers to the Sabbath as given to the nation by God in the time of Moses, and complains of its profanation (Ezek. 20: 13, 16, 21, 24; 22: 8, 26; 23: 38).

In their captivity the Sabbath was wellnigh the only part of the outward forms of worship left to the Hebrews. So, as a peculiar custom distinguishing in outward observance the Jews from the other peoples with which they were associated, it became a test of faithfulness and a sign of nationality, and in this way its importance was increased. This increased importance is however no proof that the demands for observance were any more exacting, or that the day was observed any more carefully than before the exile. In this period of depression and national dishonor all religious observances had a more spiritual signification, and were filled with a deeper meaning. So the Sabbath came to be more a day of worship and spiritual meditation than formerly (Is. 58: 13; 66: 23).

After the exile we find in Neh. 9: 14, that the people acknowledge the Sabbath to be given by God, and covenant to keep the law which their fathers had kept (Neh. 10: 31-33). Nehemiah enforces the Sabbath law by stopping the treading of wine, the bearing of burdens and trafficking on the Sabbath, but this does not imply in any way that a stricter Sabbath was demanded immediately after the exile, than before it, and that its observance was then first enforced as a civil law.* It came to be of more importance probably, and doubtless was enforced more successfully than previously, for under the Persian rule the circumstances were more favorable. But it was not new and stricter regulations which were enforced, but the old laws which during the exile had fallen into disuse, and become inoperative at Jerusalem were revived. The argument which Nehemiah uses is that it was because of just such profanations that God brought destruction upon the fathers (13: 18). This strictness of Nehemiah was not a new and unknown thing. Jeremiah we have already seen (17: 21-27) speaks against burden bearing in Jerusalem and calls for the enforcement of the law. The suppression of traffic on the Sabbath could not have been an innovation, because such a law was in force in the time of Amos. It does seem strange that the people should have engaged in such profanation of the Sabbath if they knew of a penalty of death which was liable to be incurred. But the law may not improbably have fallen into such disuse as to be practically unknown. A complete neglect and ignorance like this is surely not an inconceivable thing when the New England states have to-day so many puritanical Sabbath laws which are not enforced. Revival and enforcement like that of Nehemiah are also not unknown to us.

Let us now examine the different codes to see if they differ essentially as to the character of the Sabbath. The code of "E" reads "Six days shalt thou do all thy work and on the seventh thou shalt rest" (Ex. 23: 12). So in "J" we read "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work but the seventh is a Sabbath unto Jehovah thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work." "Six days thou shalt work but on the seventh

* Cf. Article "Sabbath," *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

day thou shalt rest in plowing time and in harvest thou shalt rest" (Ex. 20: 10; 34: 21). The evident meaning is that all customary work is to be done in six days. Farm labor is particularly mentioned because it was the most important work of the people and from its importance at certain seasons of the year was most liable to infringe on the Sabbath and at a time too when for humanitarian reasons the rest was most needful, but to make the law apply to such labor alone is an unwarrantable limitation. "J" shares in the story of the manna with "P" (Ex. 16: 25-30), where we read "Abide ye every man in his place. Let no man go out on the seventh day. So, the people rested on the seventh day." This indicates a Sabbath law which approached in strictness the code of "P."

The Deuteronomist also makes a universal statement. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is a Sabbath unto Jehovah thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work" (Deut. 5: 12-14). All work is to be done in six days and none on the seventh by any of the household.

In the code of "P" the rest of the Sabbath is not more strongly stated but is made more specific by the statement of the particular things to be avoided, as gathering of sticks, making fire, baking (Ex. 16: 23, 24; 35: 2, 3; Numbers 15: 32). It also emphasizes the solemn religious rest connected with the rest of God and observed by holy convocations. It follows that the penalty of profanation was the severest possible.

We see then that whatever be the dates of the different codes they all teach that it was the law, at least, of the nation that all labor should cease on the Sabbath day. To what extent these laws were enforced we have no satisfactory evidence, though we have seen already that at times they fell into disuse. And we have no evidence that Sabbath breaking was in general a capital offense among the Israelites.

Let us now examine the codes to see their views of the reason and purpose of the Sabbath rest. There are three different reasons which we can conceive of as operating to effect the reestablishment of the Sabbath in the time of Moses. The most prominent and influential would be the

worship of the God of the fathers. This seventh day instituted for worship and connected from the beginning with religious observances would naturally be devoted by the Hebrews to the worship of Jehovah, and so would be a holy day. Another reason would be a desire to revive a custom of their ancestors. The same desire which moved them to ask for a holiday from Pharaoh to hold a feast of their nation on the full moon would impel them to renew their ancient Sabbaths. Humanistic reasons would also have weight. They had felt the evils of excessive toil in the slavery of Egypt, and would wish to leave an institution of regular rest to their descendants. Another reason might be that by this constantly recurring respite from work the nation would have a perpetual reminder of its deliverance from bondage.

Different codes give varying emphasis to the different reasons for Sabbath rest and worship. With "E" the humanistic reason is uppermost; the reason given for rest is that cattle, servants and foreigners may be refreshed. So the reason for the rest of land every seventh year is that the poor, and the beast of the field may eat. The writer looks at the Sabbath observance from the standpoint of a man and a farmer, and so emphasizes the need and value of rest to laborers.

The idea of worship to God in this writer is not entirely overlooked, however, for the Sabbath is to be kept holy (20: 8). If it rested on humanistic reasons alone, as Lotz remarks, then other days than the seventh might be substituted, and those who do not labor six days, need not rest the seventh. Moreover it is a command to masters as well as servants.

"J" also looks at the Sabbath from the agricultural standpoint and lays stress on abstinence from labor even in time of ploughing and harvesting. It was in such points that the Sabbath touched the life of the people, and it is but natural that the humanistic and agricultural side of it should be most prominent in these writers. The fact that it is a Sabbath to Jehovah is not forgotten however (Ex. 20: 10).

When we come to the code written from the Priestly standpoint we find, as we expect, that in the reasons given for the Sabbath the emphasis is laid upon its religious significance.

"The seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest holy to Jehovah" (Ex. 31: 15). This rest is based on the fact that God rested from the work of creation on the seventh day (Ex. 20: 11) and the Sabbath is to be kept holy as a sign of the Sinaitic covenant. As "P" looks at the Sabbath from his favorite standpoint of covenants, so "D" views it with reference to the deliverance from Egypt and the bondage of the children of Israel there, using his common phrase, "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt and the Lord brought thee out thence with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm. Therefore the Lord commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day."

Though a varying emphasis is laid on the reasons in the different codes, yet the purposes of rest and worship are seen in them all. "Rest" is the root meaning of the word for Sabbath and rest is emphasized in all the laws beyond all other Sabbath observance. Rest for worship though not emphasized except in "P" is indicated in all the codes. Thus "E" reads "Keep holy," (Ex. 20: 8); "J," "Sabbaths to Jehovah," (Ex. 16: 25); "D," "Keep holy, for God brought thee out of Egypt" (Deut. 5: 12-15).

Our conclusion then from our examination is that though the Sabbath had a different significance at different times, was viewed in different lights and was observed with varying degrees of strictness and at times fell into extreme neglect, yet its essential character remained unchanged until the legalistic period preceding the Christian era.